Reinhard Kopanski

What Makes Popular Christian Music "Popular"?

A Comparison of Current US-American and German Christian Music Using the Examples of Lauren Daigle and Koenige & Priester

Abstract

By applying different (competing) understandings of the term "popular", this article showcases the criteria by which Popular Christian Music (labelled Contemporary Christian Music by the US music industry) can be described as "popular". It compares Anglo-American and German-language Christian songs by means of close readings of the German band Koenige & Priester (Kings & Priests) and US singer Lauren Daigle. It argues that Christian music uses strategies of popularization comparable to secular popular music. Unlike secular music, however, for Popular Christian Music the Christian message is a central genre marker, which leads me to suggest that its popularity (in the sense of reaching a large audience beyond religious/evangelical circles) essentially depends on the polysemic properties of its lyrics.

Keywords

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), Germany, Koenige & Priester (band), Lauren Daigle (singer), Lyrics, Music, Popular Christian Music (PCM), Religion, United States of America

Biography

Reinhard Kopanski is a research associate at the University of Siegen at the Professorial Chair of Popular Music and Gender Studies. His research interests include music and politics, music and technology, and music and religion. He recently completed his Ph.D. in musicology; his thesis will be published in 2021 as *Bezugnahmen auf den Nationalsozialismus in der populären Musik. Lesarten zu Laibach, Death In June, Feindflug, Rammstein und Marduk*. He has contributed articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *Metal Music Studies* and *Samples*, as well as for the online version of the German academic music encyclopaedia *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (*MGG*). His professional experience includes pedagogical work as a lecturer in Bonn and Cologne and freelance work in the field of audio production.

DOI: 10.25364/05.6:2020.2.4

Introduction

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is a label used by the US-music industry for musicians and bands stemming from the field of popular music, whose lyrics are characterized by Christian and often evangelical content.[1] In comparison, bands from the Popular Christian Music (PCM) scene in German-speaking countries play a rather subordinate economical role. The difference in economic impact is echoed in different levels of scholarly interest, for US-based Christian music has been well researched since the 1990s,[2] whilst German-based PCM has received little academic attention, although it forms a distinct musical genre and is an important aspect in the life of certain religious groups.[3] However, in addition to some interest-based publications from the milieu of the evangelical Free churches[4], the topic has been approached from a practice-oriented theological perspective discussing the "benefits" of popular music in a church context.[5]

This difference in both the success of and interest in CCM in the United States and PCM in Germany is remarkable. This article is an opportunity to address that comparison, using two case studies. In asking what makes Popular Christian Music popular, it understands "popular" not in terms of commercial success but as a descriptor, which allows us to explore the criteria for its application in these different contexts. For this exploratory examination I deployed the following method for the selection of case studies: I entered the terms "Populäre Christliche Musik" (popular Christian music) and

1 The article is based on my contribution to the interdisciplinary lecture series *This Is Our Song*, which took place at the University of Siegen, Germany, in 2019/20. My thanks to Aleksandar Golovin for help with the translation.
An important clarification to make here is that my usage of the term "evangelical" is based on its framing in Germany, rather than in Anglo-American contexts. "Evangelical" is understood as a type of piety defined by multiple (and often differently prioritized) factors such as Biblicism (Bibeltreue), Christ-centeredness (Christuszentriertheit) and the emphasis on spiritual awakening (Erweckungserlebnis), as well as activism that expresses itself in evangelism that drives to follow the bible as principle in everyday life (see Elwert/Radermacher/Schlamelcher 2017). In addition, the term is used to imply a Germany-specific genealogy which describes groups and communities tracing their traditions back to Pietism (as emerged in the late 17th century) and thus understand framing themselves in a manner that equates "evangelical" with "pietistic".

2 e. g. Jorstad 1993; Howard/Streck 1996; Luhr 2009; Stowe 2011; Harju 2012.

3 Kopanski/Albrecht-Birkner/Heesch/Stöhr (forthcoming).

4 e. g. Kabus 2003; Feist 2005.

5 e. g. Schütz 2008; Depta 2016.

"Contemporary Christian Music" into YouTube and selected the top match in each case, namely the song "You Say" by the US-American singer Lauren Daigle and the song "Alles ist möglich" ("Everything is Possible") by the German band Koenige & Priester (Kings & Priests).[6] This article analyses these songs through close readings, focusing on the lyrics and the musical design but also providing contextualizing observations.

Before commencing, I wish to express some self-reflections to outline both my relationship to the subject as well as my motivation. Although I was confirmed in the Lutheran Church at the age of 14, I now identify as agnostic; as such, I approach the phenomenon of PCM from an outside perspective. Whilst PCM has not been my main field of research so far, PCM is becoming a strong academic interest, and I am eager to explore and understand what PCM means to evangelical circles and how it is used to transmit their beliefs.

Approaches to the Terms "Popular" and "Popular Culture"

Concerning the terms "popular" and "popular culture", I will focus on the pluralistic definitions as outlined by the publication *Handbuch Populäre Kultur*[7] (Handbook of Popular Culture) and avoid providing a straightforward definition (i.e. "'popular' / 'popular culture' is …"), as what can be expressed through the terms' complex (and at times contradictory) aspects can fuel a substantial seminar without reaching a standardized (or conclusive) definition.[8]

Etymologically, the word "popular" is related to the Latin adverb "popularis", the latter meaning "regarding the people / popular within the people".[9] A first, superficial understanding of "popular" is thus that it describes something heard/read/watched by many people, that enjoy it for different reasons, in a quantity that might be assessed via sales numbers, bestseller lists, charts, download/streaming numbers or ratings.

A second perspective sees "popular culture" as a counterpart to "high culture", a dichotomy found in the dispute between Gottfried August Bürger, who understood "the popular" as a standard for art, and Friedrich Schiller, who distinguished the public as an uneducated crowd from the educated

6 You Say (Lauren Daigle, US 2018); Alles ist möglich (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017).

7 Hügel 2003a.

8 An overview of the pluralistic definitions can also be found in: Storey 2008.

9 Hügel 2003b, 343, my translation.

elite.[10] This dispute shaped scholarly debate well into the 20th century and is found, for example, in Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's critical writings on the culture industry,[11] with the suggestion that something cannot be inherently popular; it can only become popular, and indeed be made popular through strategies such as advertisement. Too readily then, "the popular" is denied any independent cultural and aesthetic value and – to me, most worryingly – its audience is devalued as essentially "stupid". This viewpoint is opposed by cultural scientist Hans-Otto Hügel whose defense of popular culture positions the mainstream as an integral part of "the popular" and thus as inherently valuable.[12]

Since the 1970s, the powerful paradigm of subculture theory, which emerged from cultural studies, has viewed popular culture not as deficient but as resistant to hegemonic (high) culture, with its construction "from below" considered intrinsically valuable – for example, by allowing "the people" to present criticism or signal grievances.[13] The nature of reception becomes much more central to the discussion, as recipients are no longer helplessly exposed to a popular mass culture but can individually generate value from popular culture or conversely utilize popular culture elements for their own purposes.

How, then, is popular culture popularized? For the purposes of this article, John Fiske's popularization concept is promising, with its argument that media texts have to be polysemic if different groups and cultures are to exchange and gain meanings and energies that meet their respective identities.[14] The original focus on the medium of television is easily applied to my discussion of intermedial elements of popular music. Taking into account the different positions on popular culture, Hans-Otto Hügel succinctly concludes, "The popular is that which entertains",[15] balancing within the category "entertaining" the tension between art and the popular without devaluing either. My analysis of the selected case studies will primarily employ Fiske's polysemy concept, whilst in the conclusion I look at how other approaches to the term "popular" can be related to the interpretation of Christian music.

10 Hügel 2003b, 343–345.
11 Horkheimer/Adorno 2006.
12 Hügel 2007, 10.
13 see Wuggenig 2003; Winter 2003b, 56.
14 Fiske 2000; also see Winter 2003a, 350–351.
15 Hügel 2003b, 247: "Das Populäre ist das, was unterhält."

Why Adapt the Term Contemporary Christian Music to Popular Christian Music?

In the Anglo-American sphere, the origins of Contemporary Christian Music as a genre characterized by evangelical content can be traced back to the 1970s and the Jesus People movement (which itself emerged from the hippie movement). Specifically, the Jesus Rock genre enabled conservative Christian milieus' critical approach to rock music to be overcome, with the enormous attraction of the Jesus People to younger audiences directly attributed to the combination of worship with rock'n'roll.[16] Since the 1990s the term CCM has been used as a genre label in the music industry, with charts established for "Hot Christian Songs", "Christian Airplay" and "Top Christian Albums" in addition to *Billboard* magazine's regular "Billboard charts" and also two awards reserved for CCM at the annual Grammy Awards ceremony.

In this article, I use the term "Contemporary Christian Music" only in reference to the specific genre label applied by the US-American music industry, preferring instead the term "Popular Christian Music" (PCM). The necessity for such change arises from the fact that the concept of "contemporary" is much more charged in Germany than in the United States, with the related German term *zeitgenössisch* understood in light of the artistic avant-garde. "PCM" thus allows for a general classification into the category of popular music that contrasts with "classical music". Despite the necessity to adjust the terminology, my observations are in line with those of Amy McDowell, who suggests that the genre "Contemporary Christian Music" is defined more by its Christian lyrics or its use in a Christian context than by its musical style, which can vary greatly depending on the artist, although semantic correlations between music and content (e.g. the lyrics) can be important.[17] In Germany, PCM artists and bands have rarely achieved great economic success. Unlike in the United States, in Germany there are no official music charts for PCM, and there was no category for Christian music in the former Echo Awards.

16 McDowell 2013.

17 Kopanski/Albrecht-Birkner/Heesch/Stöhr (forthcoming).

Case Studies

Koenige & Priester

Koenige & Priester is a band from the German city of Cologne with a changing line-up (six to eight musicians) that has produced three studio albums since its official founding in 2015. The leading members are the singers Florence Joy Enns (née Büttner), her husband, Thomas Enns, and his brother Jonathan Enns.[18] In interviews the band's members have stated that two verses from Revelation (1:5–6) are of personal importance to them and the source of the name "Koenige & Priester".[19] It remains unclear to which the German Bible translation the band ultimately refers to since the terms "Könige und Priester" can be found in various translations.[20]

In contrast to most German PCM bands, which tend to have strong evangelical roots, Koenige & Priester position themselves as non-denominational,[21] a character expressed, for example, in the musicians' involvement in the non-denominational B. A. S. E. Jugendgottesdienste, worship services attended by young people.[22] Before the band formed, its leaders were already relatively well known within the realm of secular music. Florence Joy Enns won the second season of the German TV show *Star Search* in 2004, but she was also involved in popular music with Christian content both before and after her victory.[23] After winning the show, she celebrated Top 20 chart success in Germany with the secular single "Consequences of Love".[24] Thomas Enns and his brother Jonathan also achieved short-term media exposure, by participating in 2007 in the fourth season of *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*, a spin-off of the British show *Pop Idol*.[25]

In an extensive interview with ERF Media, a leading broadcasting company for evangelical content in Germany, Thomas Enns describes how he found God and how both he and his wife rejected careers in secular music in favour of making Christian music. Furthermore, Enns emphasizes how important

18 Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

19 Walter 2017; Lippert 2018.

20 All scriptural citations are taken from translations endorsed by the German Bible Society (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft) in 2019.

21 Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

22 Gerth Medien 2015.

23 *Feiert Jesus! Christmas* (Various Artists, DE 2005, SCM Hänssler).

24 *Hope* (Florence Joy, DE 2004, Universal/Polydor); Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

25 Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

it is to him that he lives in harmony with God and the Bible.[26] On the one hand, Enns's description can be considered an example of a classic evangelical narrative of conversion and religious awakening that echoes an evangelical dualistic worldview.[27] On the other hand such a commitment seems to me to be extremely important for musicians from the genre of PCM in order to find acceptance in their "target audience" in what I would refer to as an effort in establishing "genre authenticity". Conversely, however, such statements can lead to a backlash from outside the PCM scene, which may explain why on its Facebook page, the band describes its music as about "faith, love and hope" and notes it is "not about conveying theoretical, philosophical or even theological knowledge".[28] Through such statements Koenige & Priester may be attempting to reach two types of audience: for believing Christians they are demonstrating they are truly a Christian band; for broader, secular audiences they insist that they are not indoctrinating theological knowledge. Yet in contrast to this latter aspect, the band is quoted in an interview on a Christian website as stating: "Our goal: getting young people excited about Jesus."[29]

Since 2017 the song "Alles ist möglich", from Koenige & Priester's second studio album, *Heldenreise*,[30] has been streamed around 300,000 times on Spotify, where it is one of the band's most successful songs. The song is arranged in the style of a modern indie pop song, using a common band instrumentation (drums, electric guitar, bass, vocals, here with three voices, plus various synthesizer sounds). The high production value is clearly evident to the listener, above all in relation to current recording technologies, allowing Koenige & Priester to parallel the high musical and technical standards of US-American evangelical music productions that Sebastian Emling and Jonas Schira, for example, have noted.[31] Stylistic devices such as the frequency filter applied on the synthesizer – the initial focus on a narrow frequency range broadens later in the track – have been used in secular pop and Electronic Dance Music (EDM) songs in recent years, with the opening of the track "Sugar"[32] by the German EDM musician Robin Schulz a good example. "Alles ist möglich" is in the key of B major, although it is intriguing that unlike some mainstream pop songs, the chord progression does

26 Walter 2017.

27 Emling/Schira 2017, 297.

28 Koenige & Priester 2020, info, my translation.

29 Gerth Medien 2015: "Unser Ziel: junge Menschen für Jesus zu begeistern".

30 Koenige & Priester 2017.

31 Emling/Schira 2017, 400–401.

32 "Sugar" (Robin Schulz, DE 2015, Tonspiel/Warner Music Central Europe).

not remain static, for the song's chorus expands the chord sequence through a tonally foreign A major chord. This unexpected chordal movement has the potential to draw the audience's attention to the song and therefore to its lyrics.

Depending on the context of the listening situation, the lyrics would not necessarily reveal that "Alles ist möglich" contains a Christian message, especially given the inclusion of general phrases often found in popular music: A lyrical "I" addresses a "you", describing her/his trust in said "you", as the latter provides her/him with strength in difficult situations. The phrase "Ich glaub an dich"[33] (I believe in you) does have religious connotations, but given that God is not explicitly mentioned, it may imply an interpersonal relationship, not least as both the German phrase and its English equivalent are used to give support to another person. That said, upon closer inspection certain lines do have religious connotations, suggesting "Alles ist möglich" stems from PCM: for example, the phrases "Dir ist alles möglich" (For you everything is possible) and "über Mauern springen" (to jump over walls).[34] The phrase "Dir ist alles möglich" is found in the Text Bible, a translation from 1899,[35] and the wording "über Mauern springen" is included in the Luther Bible.[36] The full song title "Alles ist möglich" is found in the translation by Franz Eugen Schlachter.[37] Historically, Bible translations have shaped the German language significantly, so the rather general wording could refer to Bible passages but could also be taken from a general German vocabulary – still, these examples are somewhat unusual for German-speaking secular popular music. Interestingly, the line "Alles ist möglich" offers an incidental transmedial reference to the German synchronization of the feature film Almost Famous (Cameron Crowe, US 2000), where the line is used as a salutation among "groupies", an often pejorative term for extremely dedicated fans who sometimes seek sexual involvement with musicians or celebrities – altogether anything but a Christian context. Although Koenige & Priester most likely aimed at subtly referencing the Bible and had no intention of making any allusion to a promiscuous premarital life, this possible transmedial reference opens a potential polysemy. However, this fluidity of meaning exists only when the song

33 "Alles ist möglich" (*Heldenreise,* Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label), liner notes.

34 "Alles ist möglich" (*Heldenreise,* Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label), liner notes.

35 Mark 14:36, Text Bible, 1899.

36 Ps. 18:30, Luther Bible, 1984.

37 Mark 9:23, Schlachter Bible.

is streamed, as one glance at the booklet, and more specifically its credits, quickly reveals the Christian content. Not only is God thanked first in the credits, but Koenige & Priester refer to the credits as "Danksagung" (thanksgiving/acknowledgement),[38] a recognizable part of Christian worship services.

For a further level of this analysis, we can turn to Koenige & Priester's official video clip for the song. Since February 2017 the video clip has been viewed about 225,000 times on YouTube, where it is referred to as "B. A. S. E. living room session".[39] Unlike the album version, here the song is played unplugged. The term "living room session" can imply a certain spontaneity, as a private gathering to play a little music together. This spontaneity is carefully, even professionally, staged in the clip, with, for example, the room perfectly illuminated and various cameras or at least camera perspectives. In addition, the sound is remarkably precise and clear, which suggests it was not recorded when the players actually performed this video clip. It would be nearly impossible to achieve the smooth sound heard in the video clip with three highly sensitive large diaphragm condenser microphones for the singers positioned in the immediate vicinity of the drums. Ergo, this video clip features a level of production that is in no way inferior to that of the secular music scene. Secular popular music will often frame video clips (especially on YouTube) as an acoustic/basement/studio session. Then again, the specific setting of Koenige & Priester's video clip can link the band to evangelical communities, for whom non-hierarchical, informal meetings, are part of their lived religion. In addition, the clip's staging has visible parallels to the "Acoustic Sessions" by Hillsong United – one of the most successful evangelical worship bands in the world.[40] Moreover, a number of visual markers identify Koenige & Priester as Christian. In addition to the cross clearly visible around Thomas Enn's neck, all the singers' facial expressions are blissful and they make gestures of praise (fig. 1, 2).

What is "popular" then about Koenige & Priester? The production values of the song "Alles ist möglich" are highly professional, which is certainly related to the band members' experience in secular entertainment for many years. The lyrics of "Alles ist möglich" contain direct yet subtle and non-intrusive allusions to the Bible, whereas the music could have stemmed from a secular indie pop band. The band uses forms of presentation that are common in secular popular music.

38 *Heldenreise* (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label), liner notes.

39 Alles ist möglich (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017).

40 Oceans (Acoustic) – Hillsong United (Hillsong United, AU 2013); for further reading on Hillsong United see Wagner 2020.

Fig. 1: Music video still from Alles ist möglich, Koenige & Priester, 00:01:13.

Fig. 2: Music video still from Alles ist möglich, Koenige & Priester, 00:03:32.

They include the thoroughly staged alternative version of the song in a supposedly spontaneous jam session for distribution via YouTube as well as an extensive presence in social media. However, social media is also used to express the connection to God, as illustrated by a post from the band's official Facebook page:

> After an amazing concert [in Marburg/Germany], we had a relaxed breakfast and are now on our way to Siegen! God is so good! We are so so blessed! Thanks to everyone who listens to our music, everyone who supports us! We love you all![41]

41 Koenige & Priester 2020, post, 10 November 2019.

Lauren Daigle: "You Say"

American musician Lauren Daigle (born 1991) writes most of her music as well as her lyrics.[42] Her early career has an interesting parallel to that of Koenige & Priester, for she participated in the casting show *American Idol* between 2010 and 2012.[43] Daigle stated in an interview given in 2014 that her last participation, in 2012, was spiritually important to her,[44] and indeed a strong commitment to Christianity is important for musicians from the PCM genre as a whole, as it contributes to their acceptance by the desired target group.

The song I will explore in this segment is titled "You Say" and was released in Daigle's 2018 album *Look Up Child*. As of June 2020, the official video clip has had around 157 million views on YouTube, and the song has been streamed over 235 million times on Spotify. The first musical association stirred for me by the song was with the British pop singer Adele (e. g. her song "Hello"[45]) – a comparison frequently evoked by music journalists.[46] Daigle's "You Say" is arranged in the style of a piano pop ballad in the key of F major, and in terms of the song's harmony, its chord progression focuses on a four-chord turnaround progression of F – Am – Dm – B♭ (tonal-functionally represented as I–III–VI–IV), which remains constant over the course of the song, an approach that can be identified in various secular pop ballads in recent years – very prominently in Emeli Sandé's "Read All About It (Pt. III)".[47] Despite the consistent repetition of this chord progression for over four and a half minutes, the song is by no means monotonous, by virtue of the light, yet sophisticated arrangement (e. g. the subtle adjustment to instrumentation for different segments of the song), as well as Daigle's expressive voice, which contributes to the affective potential of the song. The production of the song is perfect for the chosen style of a modern pop ballad. At the musical level, only the short "I" vocalizations in the chorus provide an indication of a religious context, based on the resemblance to a gospel choir. Daigle uses these gospel-choir-like vocalizations in various songs on the album.

The lyrics do not significantly differ from secular pop songs. Where the PCM approach is often more direct, Christian references or rather the potentially

42 *Look Up Child* (Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.

43 Yep 2014.

44 Yep 2014.

45 *25* (Adele, US 2015, XL Recordings).

46 e. g. Harrington 2019.

47 "Read All About It (Pt. III)" (*Our Version of Events*, Emeli Sandé, GB 2012, Virgin).

missionary-evangelistic approach do not jump out at listeners here; in fact, there is little evidence that the song relates to PCM at all. The lyrics, especially in the chorus, could be found in many songs focused on an interpersonal relationship in which the lyrical "I" is rather unassertive or requires reassurance. The self-doubts of the lyrical "I" are evoked in the first verse through popular music tropes ("I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough / Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up"[48]), whereby the counterpart to the lyrical "I" provides her / him with strength, as in the opposition in the chorus "You say I'm strong / When I think I'm weak".[49] In addition to being common tropes of secular popular music, such lyrics are in line with what we saw in the Koenige & Priester example. A difference from secular popular music songs utilizing similar lyrics becomes evident to a listener only in the third verse, which addresses God directly: "Taking all I have and now I'm laying it at Your feet / You have every failure, God, and You'll have every victory".[50] That said, the booklet consistently capitalizes "You" and "your", unambiguously suggesting the lyrical "I" is addressing God as the provider of strength, not a human counterpart in an implied (romantic) relationship. For a listener who first reads the booklet, the religious connotations are evident before the music begins.[51] Moreover, a Christian background can be readily identified in the line "I believe"[52] in the chorus, for the phrase "I believe" can be heard as a strong commitment by the lyrical "I" to transcendence. However, the phrase is open to interpretation: here the line is followed by the words "what you say of me",[53] and in popular music more generally, the words "I believe" form a common phrase that does not necessarily suggest a relationship to God. In English-language secular popular music the wording "I believe" is used to build emotionally affective metaphors: in one's abilities ("I believe I can fly"[54]), in emotions ("I believe in a thing called love"[55]), in people ("I believe in you"[56]) and much more.

48 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
49 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
50 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
51 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
52 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
53 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
54 "I believe I can fly" (*R.,* R. Kelly, US 1998, Jive).
55 "I believe in a thing called love" (*Permission to Land*, The Darkness, US/GB 2003, Atlantic/Must … Destroy!).
56 "I believe in you" (*Nobody but Me,* Michael Bublé, US 2016, Reprise Records).

Conversely, the polysemic properties of the lyrics allow them to also be related entirely to the Bible. As an example, the distinctively titled Christian blog *The Berean Test* (the name is related to the Book of Acts 17:10–11), whose goal is "applying critical thinking skills to compare lyrical content from popular Christian artists against the Bible for accuracy",[57] examined Daigle's song for "true Christian" content. Concerning "You Say", the self-proclaimed "good Berean" reached the conclusion that there are no direct Bible references in the song,[58] although a relevant Bible passage could be identified as complementing almost every line: e. g. the "voices in my head" mentioned in the song's first line, are interpreted by the website's author as clearly meaning Lucifer's whispering. However, the quoted reference from the Bible has no direct connection to Daigles lyrics, but merely states that Lucifer "is a liar, and the father of it".[59] The author concluded that more direct references to the Bible would have improved the song, making it "true Christian" music. This critique of insufficient Christian content in Daigle's music expressed by conservative Christians continues in other areas of the artist's life as well. Evangelical Christian circles in the United States were strongly critical of Daigle towards the end of 2018 when during a radio interview, in answer to a question about whether homosexuality is a sin, she responded: "You know I can't honestly answer on that … […] I just say: Read the Bible and find out for yourself and when you find out let me know 'cos I'm learning too."[60] In addition to the openness of Daigle's lyrics, her reluctant position towards homosexuality, which is apparently seen as unchristian in evangelical circles, becomes a point of attack there.

What is "popular" then about Daigle's "You Say"? Musically, the song could slip by on the radio between popular pop, rock and EDM tracks without listeners necessarily noticing that it is Christian music. The production values of the song are very current and the song writing is fully in accord with the zeitgeist and therefore can be accepted by broad audiences beyond the (evangelical) Christian scene. The popularity of "You Say" in the secular world may be attributed to the limited evangelical content of the lyrics. In addition, making reference to God has a far greater tradition in popular music made in the United States than in German-speaking popular music, as for example in Joan

57 The Berean Test, 2020.

58 Wright 2019.

59 John 8:44, King James Bible.

60 Lauren Daigle's Testimony (No Jesus / Defends LGBT & Ellen Degeneres) (Doctrinal Watchdog, US 2019).

Osborne's song "One of Us".[61] As a result, the need for specific Christian references within CCM-labelled music may be all the greater to achieve acceptance within evangelical Christian circles.

Conclusion

The various meanings of "popular" can certainly be traced within the case studies. Both examples are "popular" in that they reach large audiences, although the differences in scale between Koenige & Priester and Lauren Daigle are huge, a distinction that extends into the genres of CCM and PCM more broadly. Also, Hügel's dictum about the popular being entertaining is applicable here. Precisely in such PCM of evangelical character, however, we find a contrast with most popular secular music genres: in secular popular music scenes, the music (in addition to non-musical markers such as clothing and personal appearance) works in many cases on the one hand to bind inwards (i.e. into a specific scene) and on the other hand to differentiate outwards. PCM of evangelical character attempts to avoid the negative connotations of outwards differentiation, seeking both to bind inwards as well as to reach out to outsiders. This balancing act has limited potential, as the foregrounding of a Christian message in the lyrics overwrites and subsequently negates any polysemy, the integral component of Fiske's popular-culture concept. PCM faces the challenge of balancing popularity and message. For its uptake to increase, the message must be less forthright, but that message is a central genre marker of PCM. When the interpretative possibilities are expanded – as is the case with Lauren Daigle – evangelical critics will immediately discredit the music as not pleasing to God. Whether PCM is "popular" in the sense of reaching a large audience depends on the ability of the audience to connect to the lyrics.

Although increasingly recognized as unsustainable, the dichotomy of "high culture" and popular culture can be found in PCM, but not in an opposition between supposedly "high" and "low" art, but in a distinction between "Christian" and "secular" art. The cultural studies understanding of the "popular" would even suggest that PCM is a recontextualization of secular popular music and its hegemonic undercurrents that use identical (marketing) strategies: the evangelical perspective on a world full of "unbelievers" who spread

61 "One of Us" (*Relish,* Joan Osborne, US 1995, Mercury/Blue Gorilla).

"sin" is undermined by "true" Christian music intended to spread knowledge throughout the world.

This study is based on just two comparatively well-known examples from Germany and the United States. To continue its explorations we could profitably draw on a larger corpus of artists, discourses derived from Christian and secular media and social networks, and interviews with fans of PCM and scene-outsiders, all of which offer productive additional data. Whilst such perspectives lie beyond the scope of this article, this study does suggest that PCM, especially as performed by German-speaking artists, is rife with discoveries for future research.

Bibliography

Depta, Klaus, 2016, *Rock- und Popmusik als Chance. Impulse für die praktische Theologie*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Elwert, Frederik / Radermacher, Martin / Schlamelcher, Jens, 2017, Einleitung, in: Elwert, Frederik / Radermacher, Martin / Schlamelcher, Jens (eds.), *Handbuch Evangelikalismus*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 11–20.

Emling, Sebastian / Schira, Jonas, 2017, Evangelikalismus und populärkulturelle Musik, in: Elwert, Frederik / Radermacher, Martin / Schlamelcher, Jens (eds.), *Handbuch Evangelikalismus*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 393–407.

Feist, Thomas, 2005, *Musik als Kulturfaktor. Beobachtungen zur Theorie und Empirie christlicher Popularmusik*, Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang.

Fiske, John, 2000, [1989], *Lesarten des Populären*, trans. Christina Lutter, Markus Reisenleitner and Erdei Stefan, Vienna: Turia + Kant.

Gerth Medien, 2015, "Unser Ziel: junge Menschen für Jesus begeistern", https://www.gerth.de/?id=230&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=433&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail [accessed 17 June 2020].

Harju, Bärbel, 2012, *Rock & Religion. Eine Kulturgeschichte der christlichen Popmusik in den USA*, Bielefeld: Transcript.

Harrington, Jim, 2019, With a Voice Like Adele, This Christian Pop Star Could Be Next Amy Grant. Lauren Daigle Is Experiencing Much Crossover Success, *Mercury News*, 23 February, https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/02/23/with-a-voice-like-adele-this-christian-pop-star-could-be-next-amy-grant/ [accessed 17 June 2020].

Horkheimer, Max / Adorno, Theodor W., 2006, [1947], *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 16th ed.

Howard, Jay R. / Streck, John M., 1996, The Splintered Art World of Contemporary Christian Music, *Popular Music* 15, 1, 37–53.

Hügel, Hans-Otto (ed.), 2003a, *Handbuch Populäre Kultur. Begriffe, Theorien und Diskussionen*, Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler.

Hügel, Hans-Otto, 2003b, Populär, in: Hügel, Hans-Otto (ed.), *Handbuch Populäre Kultur. Begriffe, Theorien und Diskussionen*, Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 342–348.

Hügel, Hans-Otto, 2007, *Lob des Mainstreams. Zu Begriff und Geschichte von Unterhaltung und populärer Kultur*, Cologne: Herbert von Halem Verlag.

Jorstad, Erling, 1993, *Popular Religion in America. The Evangelical Voice*, Westport, CT/London: Greenwood Press.
Kabus, Wolfgang (ed.), 2003, *Popularmusik und Kirche: Positionen, Ansprüche, Widersprüche*, Frankfurt a. M.: Lang.
Koenige & Priester, 2020, Facebook, https://de-de.facebook.com/pg/koenigeundpriester/ [accessed 15 May 2020].
Koenige & Priester GbR, n. d., Biografie, https://www.koenigeundpriester.de/biografie/ [accessed 14 November 2019].
Kopanski, Reinhard / Albrecht-Birkner, Veronika / Heesch, Florian / Stöhr, Ruthild, forthcoming, Interpreting Popular Christian Music from Theological and Musicological Perspectives: The Example of Damaris Joy, in: Lindmark, Daniel / Gelfgren, Stefan (eds.), *Conservative Religion and Mainstream Culture: Opposition, Negotiation, and Adaption*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Lippert, Gina, 2018, Könige & Priester im Interview + Gewinnspiel: 2 Konzert-Tickets!, 17 September, https://www.meetingjesus.de/interview/koenige-priester-im-interview-gewinnspiel-2-konzert-tickets [accessed 17 June 2020].
Luhr, Eileen, 2009, *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
McDowell, Amy D, 2013, Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), 11 February, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002234810 [accessed 16 June 2020].
Schütz, Michael (ed.), 2008, *Handbuch Popularmusik*, München: Strube.
Storey, John, 2008, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction*, London: Pearson Longman, 5th ed.
Stowe, David W., 2011, *No Sympathy for the Devil. Christian Pop Music and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
The Berean Test, 2020, About the Berean Test, https://www.thebereantest.com/about-the-berean-test [accessed 15 June 2020].
Wagner, Tom, 2020, *Music, Branding, and Consumer Culture in Church. Hillsong in Focus*, Abingdon, Oxfordshire / New York: Routledge.
Walter, Marcus, 2017, Mit Gott auf der Bühne, ERF Mensch, Gott!, 1 September, https://www.erf.de/erf-mediathek/sendungen-a-z/erf-menschgott/mit-gott-auf-der-buehne/67-541 [accessed 17 May 2020].
Winter, Rainer, 2003a, Popularisierung, in: Hügel, Hans-Otto (ed.), *Handbuch Populäre Kultur. Begriffe, Theorien und Diskussionen*, Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 348–351.
Winter, Rainer, 2003b, "The People", in: Hügel, Hans-Otto (ed.), *Handbuch Populäre Kultur. Begriffe, Theorien und Diskussionen*, Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 56–61.
Wright, Vince, 2019, Lauren Daigle – You Say, 2 January, https://www.thebereantest.com/lauren-daigle-you-say [accessed 19 November 2019].
Wuggenig, Ulf, 2003, Subkultur, in: Hügel, Hans-Otto (ed.), *Handbuch Populäre Kultur. Begriffe, Theorien und Diskussionen*, Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 66–73.
Yep, Timothy, 2014, Lauren Daigle Talks to Hallels about Her American Idol Experience, Her New EP, Human Trafficking, and More, 7 September, http://www.hallels.com/articles/5376/20140907/lauren-daigle-talks...erican-idol-experience-her-new-ep-human-trafficking-and-more.htm [accessed 17 June 2020].

Discography

25 (Adele, US 2015, XL Recordings).
Feiert Jesus! Christmas (Various Artists, DE 2005, SCM Hänssler).
Heldenreise (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label).
Hope (Florence Joy, DE 2004, Universal/Polydor).
Look Up Child (Lauren Daigle, US 2018, Centricity).
Nobody But Me (Michael Bublé, US 2016, Reprise Records).
Our Version of Events (Emeli Sandé, GB 2012, Virgin).
Permission to Land (The Darkness, US/GB 2003, Atlantic/Must … Destroy!).
R. (R. Kelly, US 1998, Jive).
Relish (Joan Osborne, US 1995, Mercury/Blue Gorilla).
Sugar (Robin Schulz, DE 2015, Tonspiel/Warner Music Central Europe).

Filmography

Alles ist möglich (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017), YouTube, 2 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZwXBlY2qdw [accessed 15 June 2020].
Almost Famous (Cameron Crowe, US 2000).
Lauren Daigle's Testimony (No Jesus / Defends LGBT & Ellen Degeneres) (Doctrinal Watchdog, US 2019), YouTube, 22 May 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybEZE9OKwg [accessed 17.06.2020].
Oceans (Acoustic) – Hillsong United (Hillsong UNITED, AU 2013), YouTube, 8 November 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGRz2BJQRXU [accessed 24 June 2020].
You Say (Lauren Daigle, US 2018), YouTube, 13 July 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIaT8Jl2zpI [accessed 15 June 2020].